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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/PGI, EUR/PPD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT OF MINORITIES

REF: 09 STATE 124579

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: While Bulgaria has long been one of the most stable countries in the Balkans with regard to minorities, specific minority outreach is still a sensitive subject. Bulgarians still think in terms of "real" Bulgarians and "other" Bulgarians with regard to citizens of Turkish, Roma, or Jewish ethnicity. We have tailored a strategy that is sensitive to Bulgaria's unique circumstances, while furthering our goals to assist Bulgaria's evolution into a mature European democracy and a more capable partner for the United States. To achieve this, we will focus our efforts in the following areas: regional stability, promoting democratic development, and respect for human rights and rule of law. END SUMMARY.

#### BACKGROUND

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12. (SBU) Over the years many countries have had a cultural influence on Bulgaria. While many Bulgarians have ancestral ties in Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and other countries in the region, no country has been as influential as Turkey. The territory of modern Bulgaria was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (note: Bulgarians refer to it as "the Turkish yoke" end note) for five centuries, from the end of the 14th century until independence in 1878. About ten percent of the 7.5 million Bulgarians are of Turkish origin. Many of these are Muslims, but they self-identify more with their ethnicity than their religion. Approximately four percent of the population (about 300,000) is of Roma ethnicity and about one-third of them identify as Muslim. Prior to World War II, there were about 48,000 Jews in Bulgaria, but now there are only approximately 6,000, including 2,000 observant Jews.

#### OUTREACH STRATEGY

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13. (SBU) Embassy Sofia has developed a minority outreach plan that identifies the unique needs of the Bulgarian minorities. Post ensures that both Roma and Turks (many of them Muslims) are well-represented in the International Visitor Leadership and Voluntary Visitor Programs. Post identifies and cultivates contacts from these communities for such programs. The Embassy will continue to maintain a presence in the minority communities by attending events such as Iftar dinners, the gala for the 100th anniversary of the Synagogue in Sofia, and offering speakers and lectures at the Jewish High School in Sofia.

#### GRANTS

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14. (U) PAS Sofia plans to set aside a portion of the FY10 budget for grants to organizations working in ethnically diverse populations. These grants cover things such as concerts, or other cultural events, as well as seminars or relevant conferences.

#### EVENTS

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¶5. (U) PAS has plans for several events this year which will highlight our work with minority populations. PAS will work with POLEC on visits and speaker programs with schools in Muslim and Roma communities. PAS will also continue to provide embassy speakers to the Jewish High School in Sofia. We plan to organize an embassy event for International Children's Day on June 1, 2010. The idea is to bring together children from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities with a diversity theme. PAS will continue to host cultural events in areas of the country with ethnically diverse populations. One such event is a reception and Ambassadorial visit to the town of Kardzhali, which has a significant Muslim population, where the Friends of the U.S.A. Society will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year. PAS Sofia is supporting the creation of five American shelves in libraries in areas with large Muslim populations, and will seek to provide more grants for programming and books.

¶6. (SBU) Post has established an interagency working group to expand engagement opportunities for marginalized groups in disadvantaged areas. The interagency working group will also continue to develop post strategy to improve job creation and entrepreneurship for ethnic minorities. The group will increase travel to disadvantaged areas in South Bulgaria, including visits by our incoming Ambassador. Through these efforts, we hope to identify leaders in these minority communities who can be developed into productive partners for the future.

SUTTON